

98-year-old Iowa man believed to be the oldest active pilot in the U.S.

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RED OAK, Ia - He is believed to be the oldest active pilot in the United States.

Ernie Smith of Red Oak, Iowa just celebrated his 98th birthday and he did it the only way he knows how, by flying.

“A lot of people ask me this, how many landings have you ever made? I say hundreds, thousands, in the 70 years I’ve been flying, but the next one is the only one that counts,” said 98-year-old Pilot Ernie Smith.

Nothing can keep Ernie Smith on the ground, not even his age.

“Yeah I like to fly the little booger,” said Smith.

“As far as we know Ernie is the oldest active pilot flying with a 3rd class medical in the nation,” said Red Oak Airport Manager Kevin McGrew.

Even if it was a bit foggy, on Monday Ernie celebrated his 98th birthday from the sky.

“It wasn't very smart to fly, but I did. I wanted to go on my birthday at least,” said Smith.

The sky has been Ernie’s second home for as long as he can remember. Ernie’s first documentation of being a licensed pilot, dated September 15, 1942, proudly hangs on the wall of the Red Oak Iowa Airport.

“People will ask me what it is about flying that you like? I say well I don't know how to tell you, but you come out some morning before daylight and go out and watch that sun come up over the horizon and you'll have your answer,” said Smith.

Ernie rents a plane at the Red Oak Airport and tries to fly a few times a week.

“I wish it was better weather, I'd fly for you, but I feel like I better not because it's so windy,” said Smith.

On days like today, the weather ruined the fun. But, Ernie says it is okay because he has plenty of time to fly. He plans to still do it when he is 100.

“Well if I'm still walking. All the boys around here think well why not. I feel perfect, I really do feel perfect.

In order to fly, every two years Ernie Smith has to pass an aviation medical exam. He says he passed his last exam with flying colors.

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